

Expedition Travel on the Labrador Coast

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This past summer our family was fortunate to travel expedition cruise style as we ventured around Newfoundland and up the Labrador coast to northern Quebec. We began our journey in St. John's, where we took in the welcoming culture of the Newfoundland people, joining in community hall "kitchen parties". We visited spectacular national sites including the historical Viking site of L'Anse Aux Meadows and the unique habitat of Gros Morne National Park. But the true feel of our expedition travel began as we sailed along the remote, often forgotten landscape of the Labrador coast. Expedition cruises are different from other cruise experiences in that they allow you to experience the land and people in a connected, meaningful way. Travelling with us on the ship were aboriginal culturalists, geologists, archeologists, authors, birders, naturalists and musicians. We learned first-hand about the wildlife surrounding us, the geology of the stunning landscape and deep fjords, and we learned and listened to stories from the Inuit people who live on this vast Arctic landscape.



painting in the Torngats © R Franken

These stories allowed us to experience the land in a respectful and humbling way. Our visit to Hebron brought forth many emotions from passengers as we tried to relate to those that had lived on the land prior to being forced out by the government. Some eyes filled with tears while reading the names of the people who once lived here before their lives were destroyed. Others hiked around, gaining an appreciation and developing a connection to the land.



Hiking at Hebron © R Franken



Labrador Ridgetop © R Franken

We were fortunate to visit local Inuit communities including Nain in Labrador and Kangiqsualujuaq in Northern Quebec. Here, the locals welcomed us into their community and allowed us the opportunity to see how they live, sample local food, and experience some of their traditions. In Nain, we were treated to the Moravian choir, visited with stone carvers, sampled smoked char, and watched some of their traditional music and Inuit games.



Local boy in Nain © R Franken



Drying Arctic Char © R Franken

Being on the land and hiking in Torngat National Park was a highlight for me. The mountains were beautiful and the soft, springy ground and wildflowers of the tundra was a treat to explore. The views from the ridgelines offered spectacular sights of icebergs and fjords. In addition, zodiac cruises up rivers and along shores offered wildlife and iceberg viewing opportunities.



Hiking in Torngat National Park © R Franken

While travelling on the ship we watched seabirds, including Northern Fulmar soaring in the air currents around the boat and Atlantic Puffin and Common Murre by the hundreds flying to and from their nesting areas. We had sightings of Fin, Minke and Humpback whales among others. And we also were able to see both Polar Bears and Black Bears on shore. In addition, we were treated to delicious meals and lively evening music and entertainment.



Watching wildlife from the Ocean Endeavour © R Franken

Upon returning home and recounting our experiences we realized how fortunate we were to experience this part of Canada that most Canadians will never see. I think we all made a connection to the land and the people travelling with us that will remain long after our expedition cruise to Labrador is over.